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NORTH CHICAGO - Aliyah Reams may be becoming her school's next medical expert.

Well, mini-medical expert at least. The seventh grader at Webster Middle School in Waukegan took her first step toward a much deeper understanding of the medical world Saturday.

Reams was one of two dozen North Shore seventh graders chosen to participate in the six-month "Mini-Medical School" aimed to give them a better understanding of the medical world.

"I'd like to learn more about medicine and make people feel better," Reams said.

The 'school' began Saturday at Rosalind Franklin University, in North Chicago, where students took part in classes which included introductions to DNA and anatomy, as well as a chance to handle real human organs.

Public school administrators from the 10th Congressional District each chose two gifted students to participate in the optional program, which is sponsored by Congressman Mark Kirk.

Kirk said the program is different from his other kid-centric activities, which typically target disadvantaged children.

He wanted to aim a program at gifted students because of his own past experiences. As a senior at New Trier High School in Winnetka, Kirk said he often found school moved too slowly. That year he began taking additional classes on his own at the Chicago Botanic Gardens and at Palwaukee Airport, where he earned his pilot's license.

"You can lift the bar on gifted education in ways that really surprise students and teachers," Kirk said.

The program does a lot to interest students in the medical field, said Walt Ulbricht, executive director of marketing at Rosalind. When students take part in the hands-on experiments - particularly the human organs -- they get a better understanding of the subject he added.

"You'll see a spark in their eyes and at that moment science really becomes alive," Ulbricht said.

On Saturday Reams said she learned how to take a pulse and identify a broken rib bone. Everything she learned pushed the medical world further up on her list of possible career choices, she said.

Sarah Kim, a student at Caruso Middle School in Deerfield, said she always had an interest in the medical world, and hopes she gets a better understanding of everything by the time the program is over.

She's most looking forward to learning about surgery, specifically in spring when the program concludes with the students given a chance to sit in on an open heart surgery. Meanwhile, they'll do additional programs at Walgreen's headquarters, Abbott headquarters and Condell Medical Center in Libertyville.